

## Should Students Use Their Own Devices in the Classroom?

### Yes

On a recent Friday, I was trying to activate 27 seniors into our AMDG.brebeuf.org Google Apps for Education domain. The laptop cart was short by five computers, and the access point had crashed, so the only wireless signal came from down the hall. In the past, this would have ended the activity right then and there. But this time, it wasn't a problem. Many students simply pulled out their own smartphones and went to work. Those without phones teamed up with their neighbors. By the end of the period, all 27 students were working on their assignments collaboratively on personal devices. And they had done exactly what we educators always dream of:

They assessed their learning needs and found the right tools to satisfy those needs without adult intervention.



Jen LaMaster

Marc Prensky wrote about nouns and verbs in technology integration. He said it's not *what* we use to complete the task (the noun) that matters, but *how* we construct the learning objective and present

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In 1990, I began helping schools across the globe realize the transformational learning potential of a laptop for every child. From the start, there was a recognition of the inevitability that every student would own a personal mobile computer in the near future, whether school provided it or not.

However, BYOD is bad policy that constrains student creativity, limits learning opportunities, and leads to less support for public education in the future. It's a reckless idea for the following reasons:

*BYOD enshrines inequity.* The only way to guarantee equitable educational experiences is for each student to have access to the same materials and learning opportunities. BYOD leaves this to chance, allow-

ing more affluent students to continue having an unfair advantage over their classmates. This is particularly problematic in a society with growing economic disparity.

*BYOD creates false equivalencies between any objects that happen to use electricity.* Repeat after me! Cell phones are not computers! They may both



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the mastery (the verbs). The devices (nouns) the students carry are often more powerful, personalized, and efficient at accomplishing what the teachers want them to demonstrate (verbs) than the computers that their schools own. Ideally, the students create their own verbs, constructing education in ways that are meaningful to them. And the limited resources of every school can be used instead to acquire the latest technologies for students who lack the means to provide their own. Isn't this a much better use of resources than buying dozens of low-bid-winning, underpowered devices that students, teachers, and techs all agree are shaky, slow, and unable to meet anyone's needs?

Allowing students to use their personal devices in the classroom is imperative in a world full of ever-changing technology. Our students are remarkably adept at discerning the right devices for their needs. Because

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of my school's open bring-your-own-device (BYOD) policies, I see students using tablets, smartphones, laptops, and e-readers of all brands and models. Students sit in the cafeteria critically assessing each device for its use in school and personal life. Some students create flashcards on their phones for vocabulary review. Some use Poll Everywhere to gather data for math assignments. One group custom built the hardware and coded the open source software for a multitouch kiosk for our alumni directory.

Will students test the limits of acceptable use? Of course—they're teenagers. But quite frankly, I would rather they test boundaries in the safety of school than out on the wild, unfiltered web. Are there times when students don't know how to use a particular

device? Not often, but it's a wonderful opportunity when it does happen: Techs, students, and teachers all get to discover together how a new tool works to meet educational goals.

I can hear network administrators groaning at the prospect of supporting these devices on a school network (bandwidth, acceptable use policies, and multiplatform hardware support, oh my!). But if students have no problem using their devices at McDonald's, why shouldn't they use them in school? If we mean what we say—that children are our future—let's start focusing on those verbs and release our noun control.

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contain microprocessors and batteries, but as of today, their functionality is quite different.

*We should not make important educational decisions based on price.* A mentor told me that basing important educational decisions on price is immoral, ineffective, and imprudent. Doing the right thing is a matter of priorities and leadership, not price point.

*BYOD narrows the learning process to information access and chat.* Information access, note taking, and communication represent the tiniest fraction of what it means to learn. Looking up the answers to someone else's questions online to type an essay or make a PowerPoint reinforces the status quo while failing to unlock the opportunities that computational thinking provides.

*BYOD increases teacher anxiety.* Schools have largely failed to inspire teachers to use computers in even pedestrian ways after three decades of trying. A cornucopia of devices in

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the classroom will only amplify their anxiety and reduce use.

*BYOD diminishes the otherwise enormous potential of educational computing to the weakest device in the room.* The computer is an intellectual laboratory and vehicle for self-expression that makes it possible for children to learn and do things in ways unthinkable just a few years ago. We impair such empowerment when we limit educational practice to the functionality of the least powerful device.

*BYOD contributes to the growing narrative that education is not worthy of investment.* We reap what we sow. If we placate those who slash budgets by making unreasonable compromises at the expense of children, we will find ever fewer resources down the road. We must not view education as some "every man for himself" enterprise that

relies on children to find loose change behind the sofa cushions. Democracy and a high-quality educational system require adequate funding.

Check out the new Macbook Pro, iPhone, iPad, and high-def video camera carried by the tech coordinator who decided that students should be happy with whatever hand-me-down devices he can scrounge up. The message here is: "Let them eat cell phones!"

It takeschutzpah to ask a school to buy something for every student. You better make sure you ask for the right device. Kids need a computer capable of doing anything you imagine they should be able to do, with plenty of room for growth and childlike ingenuity.

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